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“#nola eats: Marketing New Orleans’ French
Quarter Restaurants Using Instagram”

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Honors Thesis for Geography, Spring 2019

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Introduction

New Orleans is renowned for its stunning architecture, lively jazz bands, and delicious Creole cuisine. The city draws tourists every year, especially to its famed French Quarter (New Orleans Area Visitor Profile 2015), which is home to iconic sites such as Jackson Square, the Café du Monde, and Bourbon Street. Restaurants that are located in the French Quarter have a clear locational advantage, in part due to the steady influx of tourists to the neighborhood combined with the area's global recognizability. Additionally, these restaurants have the benefit of being established in a city that has a claim to the regional Creole cuisine. These elements interact with one another to help develop a unique destination image of New Orleans. From a business standpoint, this is advantageous and can be marketed in order to share their product, especially in the era of social media's prevalence. French Quarter restaurants take advantage of local Creole cuisine, strong destination image, and social media platforms such as Instagram that can visually appeal to followers in order to sell what tourists may consider to be an authentic New Orleans dining experience.

For businesses in New Orleans, especially the tourist-filled French Quarter, the Creole cuisine is a golden opportunity to capitalize on a feature that makes them unique from the rest of the world; however, this leaves the question of how restaurants distinguish themselves from one another within the city. In a time where it is almost impossible to visit a site without seeing a tourist taking a selfie to post on social media websites, it is increasingly important that restaurants join the online community through these platforms (Lepkowska-White 2017). It could be easy for establishments to blend in as yet another New Orleans restaurant selling jambalaya to tourists, but social media can help provide this distinction between restaurants. Social media is an interactive means of communication through which customers can find

restaurants and in turn, restaurants can create an image of themselves that they want potential visitors to see (Perlik 2009a). As daily life relies increasingly upon social media as a meaningful facet of the way in which people communicate, in addition to building and maintaining relationships, businesses are obliged to participate in this sphere. Refusal to partake in online communities puts restaurants at risk of missing an avenue of free marketing and losing potential customers. The French Quarter has taken this idea to heart and many restaurants are participating fully in today's social media scene as a way to place themselves in the New Orleans cultural narrative, as well as a method for distinguishing themselves.

The use of social media, especially the photograph-based platform Instagram, is particularly useful for businesses in the French Quarter because the neighborhood has a strong sense of place associated with it and visitors have certain expectations of this space (Ferguson-Wade 2016). While restaurants may find it important to sell the local regional cuisine (Everett & Aitchison 2008), it is crucial that restaurants are able to distinguish their "products" from that of their competitors (Ke & Wang 2013, 276), which in this case is the dining experience that they can offer. In order to best distinguish themselves, French Quarter restaurants need to sell the entire New Orleans dining experience, as expected by visitors, and this should reflect images that visitors have of the city. For example, people often think of iron balconies when they hear "New Orleans" (Gotham 2005), so it would be to restaurants' benefit if they could sell this piece of the city to tourists by offering balcony seating, as their product will then match the expectations that people have of this place. This is key to remember as restaurants consider their marketing campaigns, because it is important for restaurants to show, not simply the food they sell, but the piece of New Orleans that they are able to sell visitors who are seeking an authentic experience.

The images that restaurants post on social media platforms, such as Instagram, can serve as a means by which to sell tourists' idea of an authentic New Orleans experience. Photographs tell a story, and depending upon the photographer and who is sharing the photograph, these stories have different meanings. In the case of French Quarter restaurants, the photos that they share can help them associate with larger New Orleans narratives, and through the analyzation of these photos different trends may emerge. The trends that occur among the photographs can be representative of the larger narrative that restaurants are trying to create, and in which they wish to participate. The elements that occur frequently can also demonstrate what restaurants consider to be important about themselves and the experience that they have to offer, since they have taken the time to post this photo with these messages online. Social media that utilizes photographs is an excellent way for French Quarter restaurants to partake in a community where they can sell their individual experiences, while also joining a consistent New Orleans storyline of Creole cuisine, indulgence, and exquisite architecture.

Literature Review

New Orleans's French Quarter is an iconic location with features that are recognized by people across the globe. Today, more people than ever have access to experiencing destinations such as the French Quarter through the advent of social media. Businesses have been able to take advantage of the new market created through social media platforms, such as Instagram. Instagram provides a particularly unique platform by which restaurants can advertise because of its basis as a photo-sharing site. Restaurants can share the experience that they are able to provide to customers through photos. This is especially critical in a place such as New Orleans which is known for its unique cuisine (Stanonis 2009), the French Quarter's widely recognized architecture (Gotham 2002), and vibrant party culture (Stanonis 2008). Restaurants situated in

the “caricature” that is the French Quarter (Souther 2007, 810), therefore, are able to not only offer the Creole cuisine that many tourists seek to enjoy, but they are also able to offer pieces of New Orleans in accordance with tourist expectations. It is through the sale of these pieces that they achieve the goal of “differentiating” (Lepkowska-White 2017, 334) themselves. These elements are relatively easy to market through the photo-sharing social media platform Instagram.

Marketing

Businesses require a steady market in order to be successful. One approach that a business may take to retain a constant flow of customers is to engage in advertising. For restaurants there are certain elements of their establishment that are particularly useful to show to the public in order to attract visitors. Lewis conducted a study in which “food quality, menu variety, price, atmosphere, and convenience factors” were studied (1981, 70). While not surprisingly Lewis found that the quality of food was the most critical factor to advertise, it is also important to note that at in his concluding remarks, Lewis stated that “it is the benefit bundle that the consumer processes to make his choice and not food quality or any single attribute” (1981, 73). The idea that no single feature is enough to encourage customers to visit a restaurant suggests that it is the entirety of the experience that must be shown to potential visitors. Everett and Aitchison (2008), in their study on food tourism, found that it was the entire process and experience of food that was more important to advertise than the food alone. This elucidates that idea that restaurants cannot rely upon cuisine alone to attract customers, but rather they must create a unique story of which visitors get to be a part, which in the case of New Orleans may incorporate unique elements of the city which have aided in attracting tourists to the city, such as having a drink in a classic French Quarter courtyard.

Advertising is meant to “identify products and differentiate them from others” (Ke & Wang 2013, 276). In the case of restaurants, this means that it is critical to offer foods that are different from competing businesses and, in consideration of the idea that experience is important to market, that the establishment should seek to demonstrate that elements of the experience that they offer are unique. For restaurants in a location such as New Orleans, this principle could suggest that restaurants should market the local cuisine that is different from any other major city in the world (Stanonis 2009). For the city, duRand and Heath’s statement that “no destination can therefore afford to ignore the importance of food as either a key or more often a supportive attraction” (2006, 209) speaks to the advantage that promoting their regional cuisine gives New Orleans as a tourists seek to choose a destination. On a more local scale, the promotion of uniqueness may suggest that it is beneficial for individual restaurants to ensure that their menu offers dishes that will distinguish them from other restaurants in the area, as well as this local cuisine. Successful advertising of dishes is crucial to attracting customers, whether this be in the form of “quality” (Lewis 1981, 73) or by simply offering something that customers will perceive as unique (Ke & Wang 2013). The regional cuisine Creole cuisine in New Orleans can often serve in this capacity as being a special experience. For example, restaurants who can advertise that their seafood is fresh from the Gulf creates a distinctive experience that will be different than one that customers could have in another destination. Highlighting these differences is key to successful restaurant marketing.

In a dissertation on restaurants’ use of social media, Vivian Wang noted that “dining is subjective and similar to fashion. It provides not only utility but also aesthetic appeal” (2014, 203). This aesthetic is one way in which restaurants can market themselves; it appeals to ideas of atmosphere, types of food served, and overall experience. When considering a place that is

largely acknowledged as unique, like New Orleans (Gotham 2007; Stanonis 2009), it should be understood that “restaurants are ... reflective of the place that they are located” (Wang 2014, 208). This idea can be demonstrated in the form of restaurants choosing to adopt characteristics that define the city to outsiders. In the case of New Orleans, non-residents often equate the city as a whole to the French Quarter, which is highly commodified as an “ersatz caricature of itself” (Souther 2007, 810) and as a physical manifestation of tourist expectations of the city as a whole (Gotham 2007; Ferguson-Wade 2016). Therefore, it is not unreasonable for restaurants in the French Quarter to adopt the aesthetic that a typical tourist holds as their image of “New Orleans.” One means by which restaurants can share their individual French Quarter aesthetics and the experiences that they provide is through social media.

Social Media

With the increasing use of social media, it is important for restaurants to consider the market that they can access by being active participants in these online communities. Dipietro et al. noted that “social networking will likely become the primary means used by organizations to establish credibility and gain the trust of its customers” (2012, 281-282). Social media is advantageous from a business standpoint in that it is largely free to utilize, as opposed to having to pay for an advertisement in a newspaper or on the radio (Lepkowska-White 2017). It also allows for restaurants to be discovered more easily (Wang 2014), in addition to making it easier to engage with the community (Lepkowska-White 2017). In a study on restaurant utilization of social media, one restaurant operator specifically highlighted the fact that they “have a trendy atmosphere here and we try to display that through SNS [social networking sites]” (Lepkowska-White 2017, 334). The restaurant introduced by Lepkowska-White (2017) has demonstrated the marketing principle of being able to “differentiate” (Ke & Wang 2013, 276) the unique products

that a business offers in order to distinguish oneself from competitors; additionally, the comment shows that priority is given to the aesthetic and the atmosphere that the restaurant is trying to portray. Atmosphere was considered to be the second most important factor in selecting a restaurant in the case of several restaurants in Lewis' study (1981). Likewise, other restaurants in the study "talked about differentiating oneself using social media" (Lepkowska-White 2017, 334). This differentiation could come in the form of communication.

Community engagement is one of the defining characteristics of business-operated social media accounts. Social media makes it easier for restaurants to create a welcoming and open relationship with the customer (Dipietro et al. 2012), as the customer is able to see people who work there in addition to the restaurant's view of the dining experience that they are offering (Lepkowska-White 2017). This engagement is a significant benefit to restaurants which are able to extend the dining experience, as relayed online, beyond the customer's perspective. It is, however, important to acknowledge the customer's perspective, especially if they have expressed their opinions on the restaurant experience, since it is possible that engagement with the customer could "improve a restaurants' reputation" (Lepkowska-White 2017, 338) (Dipietro et al. 2012, Wang 2014). Wang (2014) notes that this engagement in community is one of the most crucial features of social media. Connections with the city, customers, regulars, and other local businesses and groups are another means by which restaurants can increase their engagement (Dipietro et al. 2012, Wang 2014, Lepkowska-White 2017, Leung 2017).

It is crucial for businesses to understand that "social media has already been recognized as a new form of word-of-mouth (WOM) communication which is highly influential on consumers' decision-making process" (Hill and Cairncross 2011 in Leung et al. 2017, 241). Lepkowska-White notes that "conversational messages are more frequently endorsed than

marketing messages” (2017, 330). These ideas imply that social media is an extension of regular face-to-face community interactions, and therefore social media as marketing platforms cannot be ignored, since this is considered to be a highly personal form of engagement. Engagement with the community is key, but it is important that these engagements reflect the idea that social media interactions are being understood as “word-of-mouth (WOM) communication” (Hill and Cairncross 2011 in Leung et al. 2017, 241). Personal communication is memorable, and if restaurants are able to successfully communicate with their advertising base, it allows them the opportunity to make an impression and to stand out from other businesses.

One particular way that social media users can enhance this sense of community is through the use of hashtags (#) in their posts. The most basic function of a hashtag is to connect the account’s product with posts containing similar content or messages (Bonilla & Rosa 2015, Yang 2016). By attaching a hashtag to a post, it no longer exists alone, or solely in relation to the other posts made by an account, rather it is related to all other posts that contain the same hashtag. In this sense, hashtags can be thought of as producing “narratives” through which the all the thoughts, photos, videos, and other content posted by users of a select social media platform come together to tell a story by relating these distinct pieces of information (Yang 2016, 14). Bonilla and Rosa describe the benefit of hashtags as having “the intertextual potential to link a broad range of tweets on a given topic... as part of an intertextual chain, regardless of whether, from a given perspective, these tweets have anything to do with one another” (2015, 5). A restaurant whose social media usage was studied noted that “social media is all about telling a story about what we do” (in Lepkowska-White 2017, 333); for this function, hashtags are helpful as they place one singular post in the context of a multitude of other posts containing similar content. Similarly, hashtags support the validity of a post’s content by relating it to other posts

that are aligned with a particular message, and furthermore by telling a coherent story. This consistency among the stories being shared also lends a degree of authenticity to the posts, making hashtags are particularly crucial component of social media usage.

One advantage of social media is that it allows restaurants to be able to visually share the unique experience that they are able to provide, which makes it a particularly viable advertising platform. In a study on business social media use, Leung et al. found that “picture message was the most effective message format, as it could generate the biggest numbers of likes, comments and shares” (2017, 250). This supports the idea that customers want to see the experience that they are committing to purchasing when they select a restaurant. Lepkowska-White noted that “the overwhelming majority of online customers use social media before they visit restaurants” (2017, 228), which speaks to the customer’s benefit of utilizing social media platforms to engage with businesses. They are able to preview what a restaurant will provide, and likely gain a sense of how much money that experience is going to cost them. All of this is made available to the customer when restaurants choose to be active on social media platforms, and through the resulting series of photos and messages left online.

Instagram

Posts on social media that incorporate photos have been shown to be more effective than other types of messages for use by businesses (Leung et al. 2017). Mhlanga and Tichaawa (2017) noted that the National Restaurant Association (2015) has found Instagram to be one of the most conducive platforms for marketing the elements of their businesses that they wish to share with customers. Instagram is based primarily around photos, and users have the ability to add a caption, location, hashtags, and tags with others’ usernames to their photo or series of photos. Instagram also allows users to follow other users and more broadly, users can engage with one

another by liking posts, commenting on posts, or sending posts to users that they follow. This social media platform has great value to restaurants that benefit from visual-based advertisements. One basic principle in business' use of Instagram is simply that "the best content strategy... is the creation of visually appealing content" (Benedek 2018, 51). This content allows users to see the experience that they will be purchasing, which gives restaurant claims of quality food, specific types of atmosphere, and excellent staff a degree of "credibility" (Dipietro et al. 2012, 281). When combined with the use of hashtags, which can connect images with other related images (Yang 2016), the validity of the restaurant account's messages is supported as followers can see the message blending in well with the other posts using these same hashtags. It is also important to consider that while these photos and hashtags can offer customers more confidence in their purchasing decisions regarding individual restaurants, Instagram is simultaneously a platform where establishments can partake in larger narratives concerning the communities in which they are located. Participating in the larger narrative of the city is critical for restaurants as they partake in the place-making upon which New Orleans is often sold.

Destination Branding and Marketing

Images that are commonly associated with a place can be considered a part of a larger concept known as destination branding. Destination branding has been defined as "perceptions about a place as reflected by the association held in tourist memory" (Cai 2002, 723). Likewise, Pereira and her colleagues (2012, 92) state that destination branding "combines marketing products and services and the commoditization of people's culture and environment." These definitions paint the idea that destination brands are easily recognized images that are commonly used to characterize a place. Widely recognized images and symbols of a place can then be promoted and sold to tourists as destination images (du Rand & Heath 2006, Munar 2011,

Pereira 2012). This provides the foundation for destination marketing in that highlighting features of a place that are common in tourists' mental image of the destination is beneficial for marketing both the destinations themselves, as well as specific locales within the destination. The most crucial marketing principle associated with destination branding is that these images must be distinct (Gotham 2002, du Rand & Heath 2006, Munar 2011).

Destination branding creates the opportunity for place to be marketed. When combined with the principles of marketing through the use of social media, this creates the opportunity for a powerful utilization of platforms such as Instagram by which destinations can be sold. Baloglu and McCleary (1999) shared the idea that "destinations compete through the images held in the minds of potential tourists" (Munar 2011, 293). Considering that products should be advertised for their unique benefits, this implies that destinations in their marketing strategies should sell the "symbols" of their place that make them different from other locales (Gotham 2002, 1747). Additionally, these features can become widely recognized (Cai 2002) through the use of social media platforms which provide a physical image for users to consume. These images may be initially promoted by the city so the production of a specific, pre-determined set of images can be perpetuated by tourists who come to recognize these symbols in real life, and then continue to share these images with their own followers, thereby benefiting the city even further. Munar describes this process as tourists connecting with "the destination brand by participating in image formation and by adopting and using formal elements in their different types of generated content on the web" (2011, 293). These photos that users post on Instagram then further act as reinforcement of the images that destinations try to sell of themselves (Latorre-Martinez et al. 2014). The potential for advertising destination using Instagram should not be ignored by business proprietors.

The ability for a place to be recognized by tourists and potential tourists is critical for its sustainability as a destination (Gotham 2002). Everett and Aitchison, in their study of food tourism as a means to help distinguish regions, found that local food signifies much more than sustenance to visitors, but rather it can take on the form of “identity,” which equates to increased value being placed on that product (2008, 164). They did note that the sale of this identity could lead to a “dilution” of the self that is being commodified, but it also has “the potential to strengthen identity” (Everett & Aitchison 2008, 164). While there are possibly negative impacts on local residents who identify as a part of the culture being sold, it is nonetheless relatively easy to commodify in the age of “the proliferation of visual image and electronic media” (Gotham 2002, 1738). Communities that recognize food as a part of identity, and then further capitalize upon this cultural commodity through the use of advertising and social media, must consider the linkages that exist between imagery, platforms whose strengths lie in the promotion of photographs, and the sale of identity. It is at this crossroads where Instagram can be considered particularly valuable to restaurant operators. New Orleans is undeniably different from other destinations, therefore the concept of the city is a perfect complement to the sale of regional cuisine and local identity through social media.

New Orleans and the French Quarter

New Orleans is a city that has a particularly strong destination image including elements such as iron balconies in the French Quarter, evidence of Voodoo culture, jazz bands, unique cemeteries, and Creole cuisine (Gotham 2005, Stanonis 2009, Ferguson-Wade 2016). These pervasive “symbols” (Gotham 2002, 1747) of New Orleans are imperative to sell since it is these very images that draw tourists to the city. It is important to note that the most common images being sold are not necessarily of the majority of New Orleans, but rather the French Quarter.

Places that are iconic to the idea of “New Orleans” include sites such as Jackson Square, the Café du Monde, St. Louis Cathedral, Bourbon Street, and lesser known, but still prominent, shops such as Reverend Zombie’s House of Voodoo. The crucial link between these sites is that they are all situated in the French Quarter; this neighborhood is what tourists have come to expect when they plan a visit to New Orleans (Gotham 2005, Gotham 2007, Souther 2007, Ferguson-Wade 2016). In order to be successful in the tourism industry, New Orleans must sell images of the French Quarter that people can easily recognize (Gotham 2002). When establishments do chose to market images of their particular business that fall in line with the stereotypical concepts associated with the city, they build “credibility” (Dipietro et al. 2012, 281) with their customers that is crucial to the success of their advertising campaigns (Gotham 2005). Therefore, understanding the nuances of New Orleans’ identity is key.

A fundamental piece of the French Quarter and New Orleans’ identity is the idea of indulgence (Stanonis 2008). Many people have come to associate Mardi Gras with the city of New Orleans and have images of plastic beads, elaborate costumes, parades, and excessive alcohol consumption related to the event. This practice of tourists and locals engaging in “behaviors they might not otherwise indulge” (Stanonis 2008, 125) creates a fundamental part of New Orleans’ identity as a place where people can escape their everyday lives and “indulge fantasies discouraged elsewhere in the country” (Stanonis 2008, 125). According to Gotham, the holiday has become a “consumption of spectacles” (2002, 1751). Whether or not it is Carnival season, tourists are encouraged to indulge when they are in New Orleans, especially in terms of alcohol consumption. Certain alcoholic beverage producers have found the city a particularly viable market (Gotham 2002) and other studies show that alcohol consumption leads to higher profits for restaurants and servers (Sánchez 2002), indicating the profitability of indulgence

culture. Restaurants in New Orleans can strengthen their identity as a part of the city by offering this sort of indulgence whether it be food or an extensive menu of alcoholic beverages. By providing these products, customers are subtly reminded of the destination that they have sought as they are able to partake in the indulgence that is characteristic of the city. It is also important to consider that by participating in these acts that are quintessentially New Orleans, visitors are also participating in place-making (Fletcher 2016).

Food can be considered an indulgence, especially in a locale that provides such unique cuisine as New Orleans, which is known for an abundance of Creole and Cajun dishes (Stanonis 2009, Seery 2010). Much like some of the city's defining characteristics and sites, the food provides another element by which New Orleans can distinguish itself as a destination from other cities tourists may choose to visit. It is clear that restaurants need to advertise the entire experience beyond simply the food itself (Lewis 1981, Everett & Aitchison 2008), and for New Orleans, this local cuisine provides the opportunity for businesses to capitalize on Creole dishes around which a dining experience can be sold. While Creole and Cajun cuisines both call large parts of southern Louisiana home, New Orleans is arguably the most definitive metropolitan center that has been able to claim these foods as a part of its character (Stanonis 2009). This cuisine is another image that tourists have of New Orleans and are invited to indulge in while visiting the city. It is through this food, with dishes such as red beans and rice, etouffee, gumbo, and jambalaya being the most popular (Seery 2010), that the Crescent City is able to extend the sale of its image beyond visual consumption to literal consumption of food products as an invitation by which to experience New Orleans.

The profitability of marketing the Creole cuisine is not to be ignored. While the cuisine has its roots in many different cultures and locations including West Africa, South America, and

the Caribbean, among others, these dishes were able to be brought together in the port city of New Orleans (Stanonis 2009). This “distinct and diverse culinary culture” (Stanonis 2009, 148) is optimal for marketing campaigns. duRand and Heath note that “destinations with an attractive/unusual... cuisine should consider using it as a branding tool” and that the food should also be paired by “forming links with other tourism attractions and activities...” (2006, 229), in this case the larger cultural narrative of the French Quarter. Likewise, Ke & Wang’s (2013) study highlighting that uniqueness is the most important aspect of a product to market speaks to the potential for significant profit from this cuisine. Specific to New Orleans, it is imperative to consider that tourists with a particularly strong interest in food tend to select menu items that they identify as part of the regional cuisine such as gumbo and jambalaya (Seery 2010). These facets of the character of New Orleans’ Creole cuisine make it ideal for advertising to both food-focused tourists and general tourists.

Restaurants in the French Quarter who choose to embrace the regional cuisine have the additional benefit of their setting. The literature establishes that the French Quarter is home to many of the images that tourists hold of New Orleans, even to the degree that the neighborhood has become a prominent symbol for the city as a whole (Souther 2007, Ferguson-Wade 2016). Atmosphere is considered to be an important element in the customer’s decision-making process when selecting a restaurant to visit (Lewis 1981); therefore it stands to reason that businesses which emphasize the unique setting that the French Quarter provides, in combination with the sale of stereotypical images that match the destination image that tourists tend to associate with the city, can expect to have a successful marketing campaign. This is in part because when tourists are able to see and experience in person the images that they hold of the city, it seems authentic to them (Fletcher 2016). Some of these widely recognized elements of French Quarter

atmosphere that may appear as authentically “New Orleans” to tourists include iron balconies, gardens, and local music (Gotham 2005, Stanonis 2009). Restaurants that can offer these pieces of the neighborhood, and more broadly New Orleans’ image, are at a distinct advantage because they have appealed to the tourists’ expectations, thereby creating a sense of “credibility” (Dipietro et al. 2012, 281) in their communications with visitors, and they are providing the ability for tourists to have, what they believe to be, authentic experiences.

The tourism industry in the city as a whole also contributes to the profitability of selling stereotypical elements of the French Quarter. Over the course of the past fifty years, New Orleans has seen tourism become the “dominant sector” of the city’s economy (Gotham 2002, 1740), with the French Quarter being the primary focus of this industry (Gotham 2005). It is a unique space with distinctive architecture (Gotham 2005), and tourist focused establishments have taken full advantage of these “themes, motifs and cultural symbols” (Gotham 2002, 1747) by sharing them in advertisements for the city (Gotham 2007). Images are the most powerful form of message to share in online marketing (Leung et al. 2017), especially in terms of social media (Benedek 2018), therefore it would be appropriate for restaurants to utilize a social media platform such as Instagram that is centered on photographs and images in order to market these “symbols” (Gotham 2002, 1747) to their followers. The modern French Quarter was designed around its use as a space for tourist “consumption” (Gotham 2007, 70); the advantage for businesses who exist within a space that is as heavily commodified and strongly defined as this is that the images they need to promote are already set by a larger system of products aimed at tourists.

Place-Making and Authenticity

New Orleans' restaurants play a critical role in providing the prototype of an authentic experience of the city for tourists. Schnell argued that it is local cuisine that many visitors use as a way in which to have this deeper interaction with place (2011). Furthermore, in Fletchall's study on craft breweries as place-makers, she found that "the tourist experience is undoubtedly enhanced by" involvement in "the community's culture," and that by partaking in something as simple as consuming alcohol in a space utilized by local people, they have a "stronger connection with that community" (2016, 561). This sense of authenticity is felt because these tourists have participated in what they consider to be a normal activity in the lives of the people who inhabit this place, whether or not this is an accurate representation of local life. Considering that the French Quarter has become a large representation for the city as a whole (Souther 2007), it is, in fact, likely that this supposedly "authentic" experience is anything but true to the character of the entirety of the city. As Gotham (2005) suggests, the neighborhood has lost a significant amount of its original charm to the enormous influx of tourists, which has pushed many of the original residents out of this space. While the architecture is certainly that of historic New Orleans, the lack of residents who call the French Quarter home can bring any claims to authenticity into question, as it can be asked whether or not this space is authentic without people who are actually from the area. Despite the accuracy or inaccuracy of these representations of Crescent City culture, it can be concluded that tourists in New Orleans seek places that seem to be well integrated into the local cultural narrative, because it allows them to feel that they are experiencing the city as a resident would. For New Orleans, common experiences may include consuming alcohol or dining on a balcony, so long as the act fits the larger cultural narrative, it is likely that it will be viewed as a part of the authentic French Quarter experience.

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The provision of spaces in which visitors can feel as though they are authentically experiencing New Orleans is closely related to the concept of place-making. Fletchall states that “place comes into existence when meaningful experience is attached to a particular location” (2016, 539). For businesses, such as restaurants, whose product is largely based upon experience, the implications of operating in a locale with a destination image as strong as New Orleans include a responsibility for contributing to this idea of place-making. Restaurants provide experience, and when tourists eat in the French Quarter, they associate that act with the locale, especially because of the neighborhood’s distinctive atmosphere, cuisine, and culture that serve as the foundation for the concept of dining in New Orleans. The image of New Orleans is well established (Gotham 2005); however, by selling tourists the opportunity to not just see, but to experience the city, these businesses have a role in making and perpetuating the idea of place as it relates to the city through these “benefit bundles” (Lewis 1981, 73). These individual elements and experiences of the city combine to collectively create a place.

Literature Conclusions

For businesses in a city with strong destination images, such as New Orleans, the elements that they choose to share should reflect these “symbols” (Gotham, 2002, p. 1747) of place. Restaurants have spoken to the advantages that using social media provides in that they are able to share the “atmosphere” that they cultivate, and by posting their own content, they are “differentiating” themselves from other restaurants (Lepkowska-White, 2017, p. 334); this suggests that best practice would have businesses highlight their distinctive products while still ensuring their place in a larger community. Pictures are shown to be especially effective in distributing this message to the advertisements’ target audiences (Restaurant Association 2015, Leung et al. 2017, Benedek 2018), meaning that restaurants should combine marketing principles

and the use of photographs in order to share the unique elements of the dining experience that they can provide while still remaining within the framework of the consumer's image of New Orleans. In practice, for a restaurant in the French Quarter, this may equate to sharing photographs on Instagram of garden seating options, or a Creole dish with an alcoholic beverage displayed on a balcony. Images of elements such as these show features that are distinctly "New Orleans," while demonstrating what distinguishes the dining experience at their establishment from competitors in the neighborhood.

Methodology

As the literature suggests, Instagram as a photo-based social media platform is a particularly powerful tool for advertising. Photographs can show all of the elements of a restaurant that Lewis (1981) establishes are important to market. Considering these principles, and the idea that restaurants need to "differentiate" (Ke & Wang 2013, 276) themselves, the images that restaurants post can serve to do this for Instagram users. This platform also allows for restaurants to show what pieces of New Orleans they are able to share with their customers. The combination of traditional restaurant marketing and a focus on the unique destination of the French Quarter bode well for the photo-sharing platform's use as an advertising tool. Through the study of French Quarter restaurant's Instagram accounts and images, the elements that they are highlighting become apparent and it is possible to see what pieces of the larger New Orleans narrative in which they may be participating.

For this study, Instagram was used in order to examine images restaurants were sharing in order to determine if they suit the New Orleans cultural narrative, while also distinguishing themselves from competitors. When selecting the restaurants whose Instagram accounts were included in the research, a study area was set using Google Maps. Tourists unfamiliar with where

the French Quarter is may consult Google as a reference, so in order to best replicate a tourist's perspective of the area's restaurants, the study area was defined as Google defines the neighborhood. The French Quarter's borders for this study are confined by Iberville Street, North Rampart Street, Esplanade Avenue, and the Mississippi River (Google 2018). Google also provides symbols for restaurants, bars, hotels, attractions, and other types of businesses. Within the study area, in order to obtain sample restaurants, a scale of 9/16" on the map, equivalent to 200 feet on the ground, was used. The restaurants that were displayed by Google were recorded. For the purposes of the study, only those businesses defined by Google as a restaurant were included. While it is important to note that some bars do serve food, the focus of the study is how specifically restaurants advertise using Instagram, therefore only businesses with a restaurant symbol were included. Google also provides a brief description of the business, if it is clicked on. If the business, despite being labelled as a restaurant by Google, was described as a bar in this description, it was omitted from the study. Chain restaurants were also omitted from the study, since their location in the French Quarter is not necessarily a defining feature for a business that has multiple locations.

Once the scale had been set, there were 22 restaurants displayed as of February 1, 2019. The 22 restaurants were searched on Instagram to see if they had accounts, and in order to limit the study to those that are actively using Instagram as a tool, the restaurant had to have posted their most recent post on December 1, 2018 or later in order to be included in the study. After ensuring the restaurants fit the additional criterion of having an active Instagram account, there were 11 restaurants that were suitable for the study; of the other eleven, six restaurants did not have an Instagram account and another five did not post between December 1, 2018 and February 1, 2019. Upon finding that eleven restaurants were suitable for the study, the 15 most

recent posts were studied. The data collection was conducted between February 1, 2019 and February 4, 2019.

For each post, I recorded and then analyzed any photos or videos that were posted. In order to fully examine the visual images that the restaurants shared on Instagram, I performed content analysis which as defined by Gillian Rose is “a method of analysing visual images that was originally developed to interpret written and spoken texts” (2016, 85). Catherine Lutz and Jane Collins note that the advantage of this method is that “it does allow, however, discovery of patterns that are too subtle to be visible on casual inspection...” (1993, 89). Content analysis is also cited as providing “protection against an unconscious search... for only those [images] which confirm one’s initial sense of what the photos say or do” (Lutz & Collins 1993, 89). It is for these reasons that I decided to perform content analysis on the Instagram posts of French Quarter restaurants.

In order to properly perform content analysis, I developed a set of categories to describe the image that each photo is portraying. Rose recommends that categories should be “exhaustive,” “exclusive,” and “enlightening” (2016, 92). Upon completion of coding my images, the next step in content analysis that Rose recommends is that one study “the important frequencies only, deciding which are important by referring to the broader theoretical and empirical framework with which you are working” (2016, 96). According to my own theoretical framework, I looked to see if any trends have emerged among elements of the dining experience as defined by Lewis (1981): atmosphere, food, and price. Likewise, I noted any trends relating to the works of Stanonis (2009), Seery (2010), and Gotham (2005, 2007) which note that the French Quarter’s uniqueness and symbols of the neighborhood are what create a strong sense of place for visitors. Building upon research completed by Stanonis (2008), Ferguson-Wade (2016),

and Gotham (2002), I also looked for trends in the photographs that demonstrate the destination image that tourists' may hold for New Orleans, and more specifically the French Quarter.

Similar to the image analysis process, any hashtags attached to the post were recorded. The recording of hashtags allows for analysis of how restaurants connect themselves in a larger social media community context (Yang 2016). In order to analyze trends among the hashtags, all of the hashtags were recorded and alphabetized as to group them so that I could gain a sense of which hashtags were most often used. Each hashtag was then considered as to what it was referring and how it fit into a larger context of themes being promoted by restaurants, then categorized appropriately. This allowed for an understanding of what topics restaurants want to share with their users, ways in which they wanted to associate with a broader online community, and which themes were the most popular. It is important to note that Instagram users can follow a hashtag just like they can follow a profile. This allows for users to see any post that utilizes a particular hashtag, meaning that when a restaurant adds a hashtag to their post, they are connecting with any user that follows that particular hashtag. Therefore, hashtags are critical to analyze, as it allows for a restaurant to insert themselves into the feed of anyone who follows the particular hashtag that they have chosen to attach to their post.

Results and Discussion

Image Analysis

The 11 restaurants' Instagram accounts produced a total of 165 posts and 174 photographs and videos. Upon analyzing the images, broad categories that became apparent included People, Food, Alcoholic Beverages [Alcohol], Events, Restaurant Atmosphere and Architecture [Restaurant], and Graphics, and can be seen in Table 1. These categories were

broken down into smaller subcategories, as appropriate, that more specifically described what was being portrayed in the image, such as Food with a subcategory of Creole. The most common image type was the Restaurant category; of the 165 posts, 83 (50.30%) featured the restaurants' physical characteristics as a predominant feature. This category includes photographs in which the dining room, kitchen, building exterior, street outside of the restaurant, bar, menu, or table setting was the most prominent feature in the photograph or revealed particular features of the building's architecture that would be advantageous to promote, such as a courtyard scene. The Restaurant images show followers what kind of atmosphere they can expect from the restaurant, given features such as the elaborateness of the table settings, the lighting, and the exterior of the building. For potential customers who are in the process of deciding upon an eatery to visit, the ability to see the atmosphere of the restaurant lowers the risk they take in visiting a new place (Breed 2011). It is also important to note that the restaurant's promotion of its architecture can appeal to tourist expectations of a French Quarter restaurant, and therefore, their understanding of the restaurant as being authentic. New Orleans is not trying to describe a particular time in the past that created this architecture, rather, in these photographs, the product is what tourists can enjoy today and this idea of superficial satisfaction without a discussion of what created these products is for sale. The double-edged sword of supposedly authentic architecture is that it does not actually need to be from a past that it is trying to imitate, which makes it inauthentic in one sense, but for the ignorant tourist who is unaware of this falsity, this can satisfy their desire for authenticity just as well, so long as it fits their archetype of New Orleans.

Table 1: Most Common Image Codes

Code Category	Number of Posts Including the Code	Percentage of Posts Including the Code
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Commented [D3]: Here I explained that New Orleans does not need to even be authentic in order to be sold. It just has to be believable.

Commented [CF(4R3): I like this a lot

1	Restaurant & Atmosphere	83	50.30%
2	Food	71	43.03%
3	People	59	35.76%
4	Alcohol	37	22.42%
5	Event	35	21.21%

The images that featured the restaurant's architecture, layout, or atmosphere often also showed a propensity to share the exterior of the building. One way that this was achieved was simply by showing the outside of the building, which 22.42% of restaurant posts featured. The advantage to this is that it allows for Instagram users to see hallmarks of authentic French Quarter architecture that the building has to offer. This included photos of individuals standing on balconies and newly renovated courtyard spaces, as shown in Figure 1a. According to Gotham (2005, 1110), iron balconies and gardens are among the most commonly recognized symbols of New Orleans. The building's exterior also extended to the street around it in 14.54% of restaurant-focused images. In showing the street around the building, businesses are able to assert their place in the neighborhood and as members of the French Quarter's culture and local community. The streets of the French Quarter are often host to parades and local bands, as shown in Figure 1b. To include these iconic features of the Big Easy shows that the business is engaged with the larger French Quarter narrative of a lively and fun *mode de vie*.



Figure 1a



Figure 1b

Figure 1a: This series of photos from a post shows a newly remodeled courtyard that is open for visitor seating. This is a restaurant feature that is advantageous for French Quarter restaurants to sell, as outdoor leisure areas are associated with New Orleans architecture (Gotham 2005, 1110).
Source: Instagram, 2019.

Figure 1b: This photograph is not showing much of the restaurant itself, aside from the implication of a balcony, but by showing a Mardi Gras parade, it is demonstrating that its atmosphere is fun and lively, in accordance with the French Quarter's character (Stanonis 2008).
Source: Instagram, 2019.

Another part of the restaurant scene's *mode de vie* is the food they serve. Food comprised the second largest category of photographs with 71 of the 165 (43.03%) of the posts depicting one particular dish as their primary focus. This category highlighted images in which one specific dish was being marketed to followers, as opposed to the table setting subcategory listed under the restaurant, in which the entirety of the dining experience, rather than food alone, was the primary focus. Within the Food category, 12% of the images featured the regional Creole

cuisine. The most popular dishes that were shown included jambalaya, shrimp po'boys, and gumbo. The most popular category of food, however, was seafood (see Figure 2). New Orleans is located along the Gulf Coast, so the influence of its location has manifested in these menu selections. Seafood comprised 33.33% of the Food images. Similar to the development of Creole cuisine being based upon New Orleans' status as a major port city (Stanonis 2009), seafood's prominence is influenced by the city's geographic situation. Serving seafood could stand as a subtle reminder of the destination that tourists have chosen to visit.

It is important to note that consumption is primary way in which people can engage in place-making (Flethcall 2016). By including Food as a primary focus on their Instagram pages, restaurants also advertise the experience of the ability to actively engage with a locale. It is important to consider that despite its prominence, it is still not as common as atmosphere, and this is likely in part because they cannot sell wholly authentic food because authenticity can be debated, and restaurants are serving food aside from Creole dishes and seafood. Rather, authenticity can be sold through atmosphere in combination with food. When tourists are able to partake in consuming Creole cuisine and seafood, they are strengthening their relationship with place, and they are also able to understand this experience as true and authentic, because it is the experience that they witnessed and participated in while in New Orleans.

Commented [D5]: Here, I spoke to how food plays a role in a tourist's concept of what is authentic

Commented [WU6R5]: I also spoke to how food relates to authenticity.



Figure 2: This image from an Instagram post is of a shrimp po'boy which pays homage to what some consider to be a hallmark dish of New Orleans cuisine, in addition to the inclusion of seafood acting as a reminder that the customer is in the port city of New Orleans.

Source: Instagram, 2019.

More than one third of the images (35.76 %) depicted people at the restaurants. Within this category were subcategories of male and female, Caucasian and non-Caucasian people, as well as employee and customer, and people in groups or people alone. Interestingly, the ratio between inclusion of males and females in the images was almost equal with males being definitively included in 32 of the 59 photos (54.23%) and females being included in 33 of the 59 photos (55.93%). It is important to note that when groups are not posed in a particular manner, it can be difficult, if not impossible to conclusively say if males or females are definitively present in the photo; therefore the subcategory of "Group" was utilized to describe a set of two or more people, although the size of the groups ranged from two people to photos of an audience attending a wedding. This subcategory represented 36 of the 59 (61.02%) images that included people as primary features in the photograph.

While the male to female ratio was almost perfectly even, the representation of race was notably different. Caucasian people were definitively shown in 43 of the 59 (72.88%)

photographs depicting people, and non-Caucasian people were included in 13 of the 59 (22.03%) photographs. These numbers are particularly interesting considering the population of New Orleans. The city's racial distribution, according to Census estimates as of July 2018, includes 34.1% of the population identifying as "White" and 59.8% of the population identifying as "Black or African American" (United States Census Bureau QuickFacts 2019). The population of the Crescent City is not reflected in the depiction of people in French Quarter restaurants. There is an overrepresentation of Caucasian people in the images; however it should be considered that while employees were the subject of 30.51% of the photos including people, customers were the subject of 64.29% of this set of photographs. It is possible that tourist demographics do not reflect that of the city well, and since the French Quarter is a highly commercialized place (Gotham 2007, Souther 2007, Ferguson-Wade 2016), Souther's assertion that the travel industry in New Orleans is "a tourist trade catering chiefly to whites" which often fails to represent "the often ugly realities of black urban life" (2017, 806) is particularly relevant. These Instagram posts reflect this observation.

The fourth most common code category is Alcohol, which was defined as alcohol that is for current consumption, as opposed to alcohol being stored in a bar. This category was shown in 37 of the 165 posts (22.42%). Beer was never definitively shown in any of the Instagram posts analyzed; however, there was a clear distinction within the depiction of alcoholic beverages between wine and liquor. Only two images of the 37 showing alcoholic beverages showed both wine and liquor in the same photograph. The remaining images either showed wine, or they showed liquor based drinks including Bloody Marys, Whiskey, and Mimosas, for example, but not both. So while this category is present in more than one in five photos, establishments were typically defined as a place that serves liquor or wine with meals, but not both. Of the 37 images

showing alcoholic beverages, ten (27.02%) showed wine being served, while 29 (78.38%) showed liquor based drinks being served. Throughout the coding process, I attempted to see if connections existed between gender and alcohol, but I found that there were no strong patterns present throughout the photographs. Men and women were both depicted as consuming wine and liquor across the photographs, and there was not a gendering of this consumption.

Commented [WU7]: Description of the lack of connection between gender, race, and alcohol

Liquor generally has a significantly higher alcohol content than wine, and it was also promoted 51.36% more often in this sample of Instagram posts. The choice to promote liquor could be representative of the indulgence that helps characterize New Orleans (Stanonis 2008). This is particularly important since this is an act that restaurants are inviting tourists to partake in; Fletchall (2016) noted that consuming alcohol can be a powerful means of place-making, if it was believed that this was an important part of a place's authentic culture, which is certainly true for New Orleans (Stanonis 2008). Mardi Gras is well associated with the city (Stanonis 2008), and this is a holiday that is celebrated here as one of indulgence, which gives the act of consuming alcoholic beverages an air of authenticity. Of the liquor based alcoholic beverages shown, it was common to see this in the form of mixed drinks or specialty cocktails, as opposed to drinks such as whiskey which can generally be consumed without any additional mixers. These cocktails also tended to be colorful and aesthetically pleasing, such as the beverage shown in Figure 3a, which contributes to the "amusement" (Gotham 2002, 1753) element of New Orleans as a place where tourists engage in behaviors that they otherwise may not in their hometowns (Stanonis 2008). It is also interesting to note here that men were shown consuming these colorful, and what may be stereotyped as "girly," drinks. Similarly, the prominence of mimosas and Bloody Marys also supports this idea in that these beverages are sometimes associated with brunch, which occurs at a time of day when the consumption of alcoholic

Commented [WU8]: Here I explained why drinking alcohol may be viewed as authentic by tourists.

Commented [WU9]: Here I spoke to the lack of gendering in drink choice.

beverages is atypical (see Figure 3b). Analysis of both the images and the hashtags used in the sample posts showed alcohol as a hallmark feature of the authentic French Quarter dining experience, not simply in the fact that it is present, but also the times at which it is consumed and who is consuming these beverages.

Commented [WU10]: Again, I explain what makes alcohol consumption in New Orleans different from other destinations.



Figure 3a



Figure 3b

Figure 3a: This image demonstrates the indulgence aspect of New Orleans through the consumption of alcohol. These beverages are bright and colorful with added ingredients such as orange slices that encourage the practice as being fun. The photo also depicts the drinks being consumed in a group who are toasting, once more demonstrating the “party” element of the city. *Source: Instagram, 2019.*

Figure 3b: This image shows a woman in a courtyard consuming a mimosa. The light suggests it is earlier in the day, in addition to the beverage itself, which is typically consumed with brunch. This woman also appears to be holding her arm in a celebratory wave, implying that the restaurant and act of having a mimosa at the establishment is fun for tourists. *Source: Instagram, 2019.*

The final category of significance is the Event category. This category showed pictures of parades, weddings, and holiday celebrations and was represented in 35 posts (21.21%). New Orleans is known as a place of indulgence, and Mardi Gras is largely inseparable from the city

(Stanonis 2008). Especially with the celebration of this holiday, the city's penchant for encouraging people to engage in "behaviors they might not otherwise indulge" (Stanonis 2008, 125) is shown in practice. While Mardi Gras is the city's most distinct holiday, depictions of Christmas celebrations, often with special holiday cocktails, was shown frequently. The city is known to be lively and it celebrates often with parades, which are commonly depicted in images, and sometimes in association with weddings. Wedding photos commonly highlighted features associated with images of New Orleans such as a couple standing on a balcony, a wedding audience assembled in a courtyard, and a wedding parade in the street, as seen in Figure 4. The shared theme among the event photos is that even holidays and celebrations that are also practiced elsewhere get their own New Orleans twist in the French Quarter.



Figure 4: These images show an event, in this case a wedding, but each in line with unique features of New Orleans, including the balcony and courtyard architecture, and participation in a New Orleans tradition of a wedding parade.

Source: *Instagram*, 2019.

Individual posts on Instagram have the ability to highlight one or more features of a visit to a restaurant in the French Quarter. As the image analysis shows, elements including the food and beverages, the setting in which it is consumed, and the people who handle the food are often portrayed in these photographs. Through the maintenance of an Instagram account where all of

their posts are neatly displayed, a restaurant is able to share not just one feature, but instead a unique “benefit bundle” (Lewis 1981, 73) that they offer to customers which contains multiple elements of a dining experience, such as the photo in Figure 5. In this case, it is also important to note how these features are reflective of the location: New Orleans’ French Quarter. Atmosphere is unique in a place such as New Orleans (Gotham 2005, Stanonis 2008, Stanonis 2009), and the high percentage of images focusing on that atmosphere demonstrate its importance. This is numerically followed by the featuring of food including the regional Creole cuisine and seafood which are highly influenced by the city’s situation. The third most common theme is the humanizing effect of showing customers and employees, followed by the featuring of the city’s indulgence culture through the depiction of alcohol in more than one fifth of the posts, and lastly events which highlight the city’s character. The elements of a visit to a restaurant are displayed by these French Quarter restaurants with a distinctive New Orleans narrative being showcased. Specific features that are showcased by the photographs also tend to highlight characteristics of the city that are known to tourists to be “authentic” elements of this locale, whether or not authenticity is defined or true.

Commented [WU11]: I explain here why certain images are featured in terms of authenticity.



Figure 5: This photo shows the “benefit bundle” (Lewis 1981, 73) of a New Orleans dining experience by showing seafood reminiscent of the city’s location, an alcoholic beverage, and a metal table that is typically found in outdoor seating arrangements.

Source: Instagram, 2019.

Hashtags

150 of the 165 (91.46%) Instagram posts in this study had a total of 1,678 hashtags associated with them, and the remaining 14 did not include any hashtags. The ten most commonly used hashtags all included either the phrase “neworleans,” “nola,” or “frenchquarter” as a part of the phrase used in the hashtag (see Table 2). The trend of the destination appearing within the top ten most frequently used hashtags is a testament to the importance of location to the marketing schemes of these French Quarter restaurants. It is also interesting to note that these top ten most frequently used hashtags accounted for more than one fifth of every hashtag recorded throughout the sample of Instagram posts. The use of destination appearing with

significant frequency demonstrates the importance for these restaurants to define themselves as part of New Orleans, and more specifically, the French Quarter.

Table 2: Most Frequently Utilized Hashtags

	Hashtag	Number of Occurrences	Percentage of Total Hashtag Population
1	#frenchquarter	82	4.89%
2	#nola eats	42	2.50%
3	#onetimeinnola	37	2.21%
4	#igersneworleans/#igersnola/ #igersofneworleans	36	2.15%
5	#nola	34	2.03%
6	#showmeyournola	32	1.91%
7	#nolafoodie	31	1.85%
8-tie	#neworleans	30	1.79%
8-tie	#noladining	30	1.79%
10	#neworleansfoodie	20	1.19%
Total:		378	22.53%

While numeric counts of hashtags can be useful in terms of connecting posts with larger online communities, some hashtags were not used often, but they fit broader categories that showed more general trends among the content of the posts. There were a total of 19 categories developed from the hashtags including references to place, events, and foods. It is important to note that some hashtags fit multiple categories. In cases such as these, some hashtags were placed into two categories. For example, “#nola eats” is referring to both the city of New Orleans, as well as the act of dining. The hashtag could be perceived as belonging to either category or both. For the purposes of this study, the reason for studying the hashtags was to see if any themes emerged from those attached to the restaurants’ Instagram posts. The precise numbers of the hashtags were not as relevant to this study as the larger themes that were being conveyed, so for

categorization, hashtags were allowed to be classified under two categories in order to allow the two different trends in hashtags such as “#nola eats” to both be represented among the themes. For other purposes or studies, it may be more important that the individual hashtags be considered, but due to the nature of this study in which themes are being examined, the categories are more important to consider.

Of the hashtag categories developed, the category containing hashtags relating to New Orleans, with phrases such as “neworleans” or “nola,” represented the largest theme. Hashtags referencing New Orleans, excluding those that directly referred to the French Quarter, were used 729 times; the significance of this number is that the restaurants are clearly highlighting the city as being important to their product. This is a clear testament to the importance of being located in New Orleans, and more specifically, the French Quarter. The French Quarter category included 139 hashtags used and was the fourth most populous category of hashtags; it included hashtags such as “#frenchquarterbalcony” and “#vieuxcarre.” Atmosphere is one of the pillars of selling points for restaurant marketing (Lewis 1981), and this demonstration of a substantial number of the hashtags containing reference to an overtly unique place (Gotham 2007; Stanonis 2009), in this case New Orleans and the French Quarter, attests to the importance of atmosphere in the neighborhood’s marketing campaign.

Table 3: Most Populous Hashtag Categories

	Hashtag Category	Example Hashtags	Number of Hashtags
1	New Orleans	#onlyinnola, #nolabrunch, #nawlins	729
2	Dining & Eating	#eatlocal, #wherenola eats	169
3	Restaurant Names	#royalhouse, #oceanagrill, #gwins	144
4	French Quarter	#frenchquarterbalcony, #vieuxcarre	139
5	Alcohol	#cocktails, #mimosas, #thirstythursday	122

While atmosphere is critical to advertise (Lewis 1981), especially in a unique destination (Ke & Wang 2013), it is crucial that restaurants advertise the entirety of the dining experience (Lewis 1981, Everett & Aitchison 2008). The second most popular theme in hashtags included references to Dining and Eating, which included 169 of the hashtags used. Samples from this category included “#wherenola eats,” “#finedining,” and “#eatlocal.” Hashtags such as these do not feature any particular part of the dining experience, but rather speak of “eating” and “dining” in broader terms. The vagueness of “#wherenola eats” gives an advantage to the restaurant, as it allows for one hashtag to establish a sense of “credibility” (Dipietro et al. 2012, 281). This is largely due to how hashtags function to connect posts to others that have related themes or content (Bonilla & Rosa 2015, Yang 2016). If an Instagram user searches for that particular hashtag or clicks on it in a post to see other posts that utilize the hashtag, they are likely to see images that similarly show a New Orleans dining experience, whether it be photos of balconies and courtyards, or gumbo and po’boys. If this image appears consistent with the “narratives” (Yang 2016, 14) that other posts with the hashtag are forming, then it adds a degree of authenticity to the idea that the restaurant posting the image is, indeed, “where New Orleans eats.”

Continuing on the theme of the dining experience, restaurants do ultimately want and need customers to select their establishment rather than their competitors. This “differentiating” (Lepkowska-White 2017, 334) is important in a restaurant’s marketing campaign, as it is the feature that will ultimately draw customers to their particular restaurant. Individual restaurant names as hashtags represented the third most common category with examples including “#napoleonhouse,” “#royalhouse neworleans,” and “#pier424seafood.” Restaurant names were used 144 times in the restaurants’ Instagram posts. Similar to the use of the dining experience as

a platform through which restaurants can share their own particular services and products, if a user were to look at the culmination of images connected by a hashtag with a restaurant's name, this would give the customer an image of a collective dining experience at that establishment consisting of images created by a variety of Instagram users who happened to utilize that hashtag. As opposed to only seeing one element of the dining experience that posts typically share, by creating a community of posts using that particular hashtag, restaurants are able to connect images depicting anything from atmosphere, to food, to holiday decorations that are all related because of their existence in one particular place. This type of hashtag also lends an air of "credibility" (Dipietro et al. 2012, 281) to the message the restaurants are trying to share with their followers, and users who find their posts via hashtags as they see consistency in the photos.

On the theme of selling New Orleans and the dining experience, a critical point-of-sale is comprised of alcohol. The category of Alcohol, which was the fourth most popular category, included 122 hashtags. The hashtags referring to alcohol were interesting in that there was a considerable amount of variety among them with all except four hashtags only being utilized between one and four times each. This does attest to some of the difficulties of using hashtags to create communities. This category included hashtags such as "#bloodymary," "#liquorgram," and "#champagne," which all refer to alcohol or its consumption, but due to the high variance seen in this category, it does not necessarily create a community of photographs particular to the restaurant community in New Orleans as was often seen in the first three categories. For example, an Instagram search for "#wherenola eats" is attached to photos of dining experiences in New Orleans, but a search for a hashtag that is less specific such as "#liquorgram" shows photographs of various liquor-based beverages, but none in the top nine that are related to New Orleans, as seen in Figure 6. While connecting the post to New Orleans "narratives" (Yang 2016,

14) is not entirely necessary in terms of stating a clear message to followers, it does take away the advantage of allowing users to see a specific coherent narrative about New Orleans dining experience. It should be remembered, however, that simply the act of consuming alcohol is considered to be invaluable to the process of place-making in the city (Fletcher 2016), so it is likely that generally depicting alcohol is sufficient enough for reminding visitors of their location.

These five most popular categories of hashtags relating to New Orleans demonstrate what elements of an image French Quarter restaurants prefer to show in their attempts to market the dining experience that they offer. It is evident that New Orleans is the most important community that restaurants seek to join in terms of hashtag usage. This is logical since “New Orleans” has a variety of connotations including its distinctive iron balcony architecture (Gotham 2005), the memorable Creole cuisine associated with the city (Stanonis 2009), and the prominence of indulgence culture (Stanonis 2008). Similar to the idea that restaurants need to ensure that they are advertising more than one element of the dining experience (Lewis 1981, Everett & Aitchison 2008), by advertising the idea of destination and all that is encompassed by the concept of “New Orleans,” this presents a well-rounded experience rather than one element alone. Another advantage to utilizing a hashtag with a short term such as “nola” is that this can easily be associated with other phrases and ideas, while still allowing posts to participate in telling a New Orleans story, as can be seen in Figure 6.

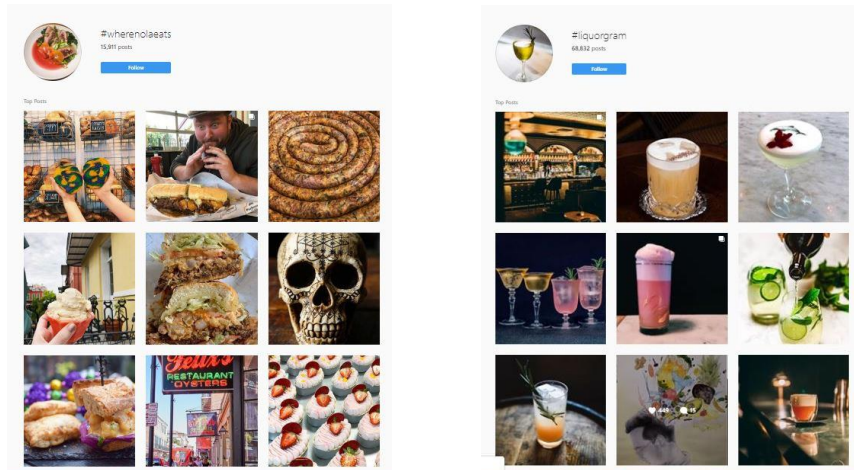


Figure 6: These two images show screenshots of the first nine images that appear when the hashtags “#wherenola eats” (left) and “#liquorgram” (right) are searched. This demonstrates that by adding a phrase referring to New Orleans in the hashtag, the set of images that is collected relies more upon the city’s cultural narratives.

Source: Instagram, 2019.

The other most popular categories, including Dining, Restaurant Names, and Alcohol, show elements of the dining experience that allow potential customers to see what they might expect from a particular restaurant. Dining hashtags can speak to the restaurant quality and culture, especially if words such as “eat,” “eating,” and “dining” are used in conjunction with specific phrases referring to New Orleans or the French Quarter, which implies the city is a critical part of the dining experience they are selling. To further distinguish themselves, the category of Restaurant Names is used to narrow down the larger New Orleans dining narrative to more specific experiences at the restaurant named in the hashtag. Alcohol may be a significant piece of a restaurant’s experience that they offer, so this category of hashtag similarly serves to share what authentic experiences certain restaurants are providing to customers. Ultimately, hashtags are serving the function of marking elements of a restaurant’s product and connecting it

to other posts with similar content (Bonilla & Rosa 2015). The culmination of these individual elements being marketed results in an Instagram user's ability to easily understand the dining service being sold, to see other users' posts about the place in question, and to see connections between these various features. For a city such as New Orleans that can provide unique settings (Gotham 2005), regional cuisine (Stanonis 2009), and indulgence culture (Stanonis 2008) the use of the hashtag feature is particularly important.

Conclusion

New Orleans' French Quarter is a unique environment whose food, architecture, and lively culture help build a strong destination image that restaurants are able to incorporate in their marketing campaigns in order to attract customers. By its nature, destination image is inherently a visual concept, and by combining this idea of imagery with a photograph-based social media platform such as Instagram, businesses are incentivized to share images that match the expectations of visitors' images of New Orleans. This may come in the form of the restaurant's atmosphere, the food they serve, or the elements of the indulgence culture that they are able to provide, so long as these elements are also reminiscent of the French Quarter. As seen in the results of this study, while the concepts of food and eating are certainly prevalent, they come second to atmosphere in both the image and hashtag analyses. It is also important to recognize that the atmosphere in the case of these restaurants is comprised of the facets of New Orleans that they can market to their followers such as the ability to eat in a courtyard or on a balcony. The city has a strong destination image, and it is easy for restaurants to capitalize upon the foundational work of creating this image that has already been done, especially when the added benefit of their neighborhood both being based upon and borne of these expectations is considered.

While atmosphere is undoubtedly the most important aspect of the French Quarter dining experience that these restaurants are trying to sell, other features such as the menu and means of indulgence are also critical to share. This is largely because these features are still important in perpetuating the cultural narrative of New Orleans. Hanna suggests that it is important to consider the “partial representations” that make place (1996, p. 646), and in the case of New Orleans restaurants, this is features of the experience of dining in the French Quarter. The Creole cuisine was created in this part of the world, and it is defined by that fact, as is demonstrated by its use of seafood and other ingredients that could be easily accessed because of the city’s port. To be able to eat this cuisine in the city provides an experience that is undeniably authentic, in the minds of tourists, because it matches the expectations and images that are commonly held by New Orleans visitors (Stanonis 2009). The idea of eating as a means by which to experience the French Quarter is supported by the frequent use of hashtags such as “#nola eats,” “#nola foodie,” and “#nola dining.” These hashtags make the act of eating inseparable from the city itself, and they relate it to the overall image of New Orleans that posts who use these hashtags collectively create (Bonilla & Rosa 2015, Yang 2016). Likewise, the prevalence of alcohol in photographs and in hashtags demonstrates this idea of selling elements of New Orleans; the city is known for its culture of indulgence (Stanonis 2008) and alcohol is one way that people partake in this narrative. By highlighting the common consumption of alcoholic beverages, the city’s identity is once more reaffirmed. The literal consumption of these products also serves to provide a “meaningful experience” (Fletcher 2016, 539) that aids tourists in their place-making. In the case of French Quarter restaurants, it is clear that food and alcohol are simply another means by which the city and experiences of this place are being sold.

Through the analysis of images posted to Instagram by French Quarter restaurants, it is evident that the sale of New Orleans is critical to the success of these establishments. While all elements of the dining experience are important to advertise (Lewis 1981), these businesses have been able to create a collective cultural narrative that relates every element of dining to the atmosphere of New Orleans' French Quarter. They have also managed to do this while simultaneously posting authentic New Orleans elements that they individually own and can sell to tourists as a way by which to distinguish themselves from other restaurants in the city. Due to the visual nature of the elements of place, French Quarter restaurants are able to easily utilize social media platforms, such as Instagram, to share the part of the New Orleans cultural narrative that they are able to sell. The prominence of Creole cuisine, alcohol, and the restaurants' architecture as themes among the images and hashtags stands as a testament to the importance of "New Orleans" as a platform upon which visits to these restaurants are able to be marketed on Instagram. All of the themes that have emerged from the images and hashtags are elements that work together to make place in this distinctive destination, and by selling tourists a shrimp po'boy and a piece of New Orleans, the idea of an authentic experience ultimately becomes the product of French Quarter restaurants.

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